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THESIS

**GEORGIA'S QUEST FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP:
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

by

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December 2010

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**GEORGIA'S QUEST FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP:
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Georgia has a résumé of achievements in its relations with NATO since 1992. However, at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the NATO Allies chose not to offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan. At the 2009 Strasbourg-Kehl Summit, the NATO Allies again chose not to offer Georgia such a plan. This thesis examines Georgia's prospects for NATO membership. It investigates the hypothesis that Georgia's membership aspirations are affected by two sets of variables—internal and external. The two key internal variables that affect Georgia's prospects for membership are Tbilisi's progress on reforms and the unresolved conflicts with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The NATO Allies will continue to evaluate Georgia on its efforts to democratize, develop a market economy, and create a professional military that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security. Georgia notes that the separatist regions are within its internationally recognized borders, but neither region desires to be reconciled with the government in Tbilisi. The primary external variable remains Russia's policy toward Georgia. Russia is opposed to Georgia joining NATO and has since the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war recognized the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEC	Central Electoral Commission
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
GNCC	Georgian National Communications Commission
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
ISAB	International Security Advisory Board
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGC	NATO-Georgia Commission
PFP	Partnership for Peace
UNM	United National Movement

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Georgia has had a long relationship with NATO. It began in June 1992, when Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC).¹ Membership in the NACC took place against the backdrop of Georgia's newfound independence after nearly 70 years of Soviet rule. Two years after joining the NACC, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace program, which has the goal of improving security and defense-related cooperation between NATO and partner countries in the Euro-Atlantic Region.² Georgia was also a founding member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC).³ While simultaneously being associated with NATO partnership organizations, Georgia was also associated with post-Soviet organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Council of Defense Ministers. Georgia's dual arrangement changed after its Rose Revolution in 2003. Georgia made membership in NATO a top priority.⁴

On 29 October 2004, Georgia became the first country to agree to an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP).⁵ Georgia's IPAP was followed in 2006 by NATO's offer of an Intensified Dialogue which, some observers hold, was the highpoint of

1 The NATO Handbook, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb020201.htm> (accessed 22 January 2010).

2 NATO's Relations with Georgia. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_38988.htm (accessed 22 January 2010).

3 KŘÍŽ, Zdeněk and Zinaida SHEVCHUK. "Georgia on the Way to NATO after the Russian Georgian Armed Conflict in 2008" *Defense and Strategy*. (2009), 101–115
<http://www.defenceandstrategy.eu/cs/aktualni-cislo-1-2009/clanky/georgia-on-the-way-to-nato-after-the-russian-georgian-armed-conflict-in-2008.html> (accessed 7 January 2010), 103.

4 Paul Gallis, *Enlargement Issues at NATO's Bucharest Summit*. Congressional Research Service. (2008), 21.

5 Individual Partnership Action Plans. <http://www.nato.int/issues/ipap/index.html> (accessed 22 January 2010).

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's efforts to move closer toward the alliance.⁶ As Georgia oriented itself closer to NATO, it severed its ties with post-Soviet organizations such as the Council of Defense Ministers and the CIS itself. Georgia withdrew from the CIS Defense Council in 2006⁷ and from the CIS completely three years later in August 2009.⁸ Georgian President Saakashvili referred to the move as the "final goodbye to the Soviet Union."⁹

During Georgia's nearly twenty-year association with NATO, it has developed an impressive résumé with favorable prospects for eventual membership in the alliance. It was expected in 2007 and early 2008 that Georgia would receive a Membership Action Plan (MAP). However, at NATO's Bucharest Summit in April 2008, Georgia's path to membership stalled. The NATO heads of state and government agreed that Georgia would become a member of NATO but set no timeline.

NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications. We have asked Foreign Ministers to make a first assessment of progress at their December 2008 meeting. Foreign Ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia.¹⁰

6 Kakha Jibladze. "Russia's Opposition to Georgia's Quest for NATO Membership." Central Asia-Caucuses Institute Silk Road Studies Program, China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly 5. No 1. (2007), 45–51, 47.

7 Georgia Withdraws from CIS defense Council
<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/georgia/hypermail/200602/0019.shtml> (accessed 22 January 2010).

8 Georgia Finalizes Withdrawal from the CIS
http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgia_Finalizes_Withdrawal_From_CIS/1802284.html (accessed 22 January 2010).

9 Ibid.

10 North Atlantic Council, Bucharest Summit Declaration, 3 April 2008, par. 23,
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 22 January 2010).

At the April 2009 Strasbourg-Kehl Summit the NATO heads of state and government “reaffirmed” their decision that Georgia would become a member of NATO, yet again they set no timeline.¹¹

The reluctance of NATO to offer a MAP to Tbilisi suggests that Georgia still has some areas that it must improve in to enhance its prospects for membership.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the challenges that Georgia must overcome in its efforts to obtain membership in NATO and analyze how those challenges complicate Georgia’s prospects for NATO membership.

B. IMPORTANCE

Georgia’s success or failure in seeking membership in NATO has the potential for an impact that would be felt not only in Georgia, but also in the Caucasus and beyond. Within Georgia, the failure to obtain membership in NATO could be a setback for democracy. Some believe that Georgia is a post-Soviet country with a great chance to make a democratic transition.¹² Georgian citizens demonstrated their feelings about autocracy by removing two authoritarian presidents over the course of 15 years.¹³ After the Rose Revolution Georgia chose to look toward NATO, the European Union, and democracy instead of simultaneously cultivating relations with Russia or seeking alignment with Russia. Should Georgia not obtain NATO membership and be truly integrated with Euro-Atlantic institutions, Georgian reforms could potentially stop and reverse. Georgian politicians who are proponents of democratic governance may lose

11 North Atlantic Council, Strasbourg-Kehl Summit Declaration, 4 April 2009, par 29, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease (accessed 22 January 2010).

12 Chatham House. The Georgia Challenge and the New U.S. Administration, Europe, and Russia., http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13314_210109summary.pdf (accessed 7 January 2010).

13 Temuri Yakobashvili. “Georgia’s Path to NATO.” In Next Steps in Forging a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea, edited by Ronald Asmus. 185- 196. Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, 187.

credibility, and this could reopen the door for autocratic or other leaders opposed to democracy to gain influence.¹⁴ Georgia could also potentially become another case study in superpresidentialism.¹⁵

Should Georgia decide to seek an alternative to democratization and closer ties with the NATO and the European Union, the other South Caucasus states may deepen their relationships with Russia at the expense of Euro-Atlantic institutions. Such a development would certainly benefit Russia, which is a major player in the region and an opponent of Georgia's NATO ambitions. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia "give increasingly frequent signals of readiness to participate in transatlantic cooperation at a much more advanced level than the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program currently offers. In private conversation, highly placed officials from these countries do not hide their hope of seeing closer cooperation with NATO develop into actual membership."¹⁶ It must be pointed out that of the three countries Armenia has the closest ties to Russia.¹⁷

Georgia's location makes it a country of geostrategic importance. Temuri Yakobashvili writes that "Georgia is on the border between Europe and Asia, between the former Ottoman, Russian and Persian Empires and their contemporary successor states, between democratic, autocratic and theocratic forms of governance and is literally the meat in a sandwich of terrorism, between the North Caucasus and the Middle East. Without a clear orientation, Georgia will find itself quickly relegated to the league of failed states, taking on various features of the countries in its immediate neighborhood."¹⁸ Georgia is also an energy transit country for oil and natural gas from

¹⁴ Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia's Path to NATO." In *Next Steps in Forging a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, edited by Ronald Asmus, 185–196. Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, 194.

¹⁵ Steven M. Fish. 2001. "The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion." *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 69.

¹⁶ Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia's Path to NATO." In *Next Steps in Forging a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, edited by Ronald Asmus, 185–196. DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, 191–192.

¹⁷ Vladimir Socor. "NATO Prospects on the South Caucasus" *Central Asia Caucasus Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University, On the Occasion of the NATO Summi..* (2004).

¹⁸ Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia's Path to NATO." In *Next Steps in Forging a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, edited by Ronald Asmus. 185–196. DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, 185.

the Caspian Sea region to European and world markets as well as an access corridor for U.S. and NATO forces in Central Asia and the Middle East.¹⁹ Ensuring access to Caspian energy resources and promoting democratic advancement are important to EU and NATO countries. This point was emphasized in 2005 by General James Jones, the EUCOM commander at the time:

The Caucasus is increasingly important to our interests. Its air corridor has become a crucial lifeline between coalition forces in Afghanistan and our bases in Europe. Caspian oil, carried through the Caucasus, may constitute as much as 25 percent of the world's growth in oil production over the next five years. This region is a geographical pivot point in the spread of democracy and free market economies.²⁰

The EU recognizes Georgia's importance for the reasons listed above in addition to the view of it as being in the "New Europe."²¹

It should come as no surprise that Russia is opposed to eastward expansion by NATO. In 2004, Vladimir Socor wrote that Russia aims to isolate Georgia from NATO and the EU through a policy of "controlled instability" from which Russia intends to gain political leverage.²² The five-day war in August 2008 is a good example of this policy. Russia used the situation in South Ossetia to its advantage.

The spread of democracy and by extension NATO enlargement combined with access to energy resources have resulted in a situation in which the interests of the NATO and the interests of Russia are not entirely compatible, and Georgia's future alignment with NATO or Russia is likely to benefit one to the detriment of the other. Georgia's future alignment with NATO or with Russia could influence further democratization in

¹⁹ Vladimir Socor. "The Frozen Conflicts: A Challenge to Euro-Atlantic Interests" *The German Marshall Fund of the United States, on the Occasion of the NATO Summit, For A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy For the Black Sea Region*, (2004).

²⁰ General James L. Jones USMC Commander United States European Command Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee 9 March 2005.http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2005_hr/050309-jones1.pdf (accessed 7 January 2010).

²¹ Dov Lynch. "Why Georgia Matters." *Chaillot Paper, European Union Institute for Security Studies N 86* (2001): 1-93, 84.

²² Vladimir Socor. "NATO Prospects on the South Caucasus" *Central Asia Caucasus Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University, On the Occasion of the NATO Summit*, (2004).

Georgia and the surrounding area as well as influence the terms through which EU and NATO countries have access to energy resources in the Caspian Sea region.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis investigates the hypothesis that Georgia's prospects for membership in NATO are affected by two sets of variables, one internal and one external. The two internal variables that affect Georgia's NATO aspirations are Georgia's progress on required reforms and the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The first internal variable is Georgia's progress on reforms. As a condition of joining NATO, Georgia is evaluated on its efforts to "democratize, develop a market economy, and create a professional military that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security."²³ Georgia's government has made good progress in implementing a variety of reforms since the country's Rose Revolution in 2003.²⁴ However, its progress has been inconsistent at times, resulting in concern about its suitability to move forward in the membership process.²⁵

The second internal variable affecting Georgia's NATO ambitions is perhaps the more contentious of the two—that is, the unresolved conflicts with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which gained nominal independence (with recognition only by Nicaragua, Russia, and Venezuela) after armed conflict with the government of Georgia.²⁶ Georgia maintains that both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are part of its territory based on international law.²⁷ Conversely, South Ossetians and Abkhazians assert that they were folded into Georgia against their will and because of that they had a right

²³ Jim Nichol. Georgia (Republic) and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implications, Congressional Research Service. (2008), 2.

²⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Georgia Towards Euro-Atlantic Integration.

²⁵ Paul Gallis. Enlargement Issues at NATO's Bucharest Summit, *Congressional Research Service*. (2008), 20.

²⁶ Igor Torbakov. "South Ossetia Crisis Stokes Tension Between Russia and Georgia," Eurasianet, August 24, 2004, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav082504.shtml> (accessed 27 January 2010).

²⁷ Russia Georgia Conflict: Why both sides have valid points, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2008/0819/p12s01-woeu.html> (accessed 27 January 2010).

to declare independence when the Soviet Union collapsed.²⁸ Georgian forces entered South Ossetia in August 2008 and the conflict evolved into a battle which pitted Russian and South Ossetian forces against those of Georgia. The status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was an area of concern for NATO prior to the 2008 Georgia-Russia war, but not necessarily to the point of being a “showstopper” for Georgian membership in NATO as long as Tbilisi acted in good faith to resolve the conflict. On 4 December 2009, the NATO heads of state and government pledged support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, called on Russia to reverse its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and encouraged concerned parties to pursue peaceful resolution of the conflict.²⁹ Georgia’s ability to resolve the conflicts involving South Ossetia and Abkhazia is likely to have a significant impact on its future progress toward NATO membership.

The external variable that affects Georgia’s NATO aspirations is Russia’s policy toward the country. Russia is opposed to Georgia joining NATO and has made no attempts to disguise how it would view Tbilisi’s membership in the alliance. Vladimir Putin referred to NATO’s expansion as a direct threat. On 10 February 2007 in Munich, he stated,

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17

²⁸ Russia Georgia Conflict: Why both sides have valid points, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2008/0819/p12s01-woeu.html> (accessed 27 January 2010).

²⁹ Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Council, 4 December 2009, par. 13, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_59699.htm?mode=pressrelease (accessed 27 January 2010).

May 1990. He said at the time that: ‘the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.’ Where are these guarantees? ³⁰

Dmitri Medvedev, the current Russian President, voiced similar concerns directly to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili when he warned that joining NATO would make the relationship between Russia and Georgia worse than it already was.³¹ Presently there does not appear to be much improvement in the relationship between Georgia and Russia.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Georgia’s NATO ambitions reveals an ongoing debate as to whether Georgia is ready to become a member of NATO. Within the debate, there is a general consensus that Georgia faces a number of challenges in its bid to join NATO. Some argue that Georgia’s challenges are such that the country is not ready to join NATO, while others argue that these challenges can be overcome with direct assistance from NATO.

One of the considerations for joining NATO is a country’s level of progress in making democratic and military reforms.³² For a former Soviet republic making military and political reforms is no small feat. Travis Bounds and Ryan Hendrickson write, “while Georgian officials have made progress towards having free and fair democratic elections, they have yet to meet the criteria set out by most election observation organizations.”³³ They cite irregularities reported by the OSCE, such as voter intimidation and partisan behavior by Georgia’s Central Election Commission, as examples of areas that need improvement. The Secretary General of NATO has also publicly warned Georgia against

³⁰ Vladimir Putin. 2007. Transcript of Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html> (accessed 22 February 2010).

³¹ Sophia Kishkovsky. “Georgia is Warned by Russia against Plans to Join NATO,” June 7, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/world/europe/07russia.html> (accessed January 27 2010).

³² Jim Nichol. Georgia (Republic) and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implications, Congressional Research Service. (2008), 2.

³³ Travis Bounds and Ryan Hendrickson. Georgian Membership in NATO: Policy Implications of the Bucharest Summit. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no. 1, (2009), 24.

conducting activities deemed undemocratic. In November 2007, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said, “The imposition of Emergency Rule, and the closure of media outlets in Georgia, a Partner with which the Alliance has an Intensified Dialogue, are of particular concern and not in line with Euro-Atlantic values.”³⁴ This warning came shortly after the Georgian government closed media outlets in the country and declared martial law in response to protests.³⁵

Georgia’s military reforms, while not perfect, have also been a display of significant progress. In this regard, Bounds and Hendrickson write that the Georgian government has implemented reforms to bring its military “more closely into compliance with NATO standards.”³⁶ The government plans to reduce the size of the military by 2015 by about 30 percent from 28,666 to 18,755.³⁷ Georgia has played an important role in Euro-Atlantic security by participating in operations in Kosovo and Iraq.³⁸ Despite Georgia’s impressive achievements and contributions both politically and militarily, Bounds and Hendrickson believe that it fails to meet criteria for membership set forth in the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement, criteria that they acknowledge have been disregarded on previous occasions.

The relevance of the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement was raised by Temuri Yakobashvili and Jonathan Kulick of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in a Black Sea Paper written for the German Marshall Fund of the United States. They also acknowledge that Georgia has made impressive progress in its internal reforms. Whereas Bounds and Henderson focused primarily on Georgian political and military reforms, Yakobashvili and Kulick in 2007 focused on the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They argued that resolving these

³⁴ NATO. Press release. Statement by the Secretary General on the Situation in Georgia, 8 November 2007, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2007/p07-114e.html> (accessed 7 January 2010).

³⁵ Tara Bahrapour. “Pro-Western Georgia Declares State of Emergency,” November 8, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/07/AR2007110700250.html> (accessed 7 January 2010).

³⁶ Travis Bounds and Ryan Hendrickson. Georgian Membership in NATO: Policy Implications of the Bucharest Summit. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no. 1, (2009), 20–30, 27.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 28.

conflicts should not be an impediment to membership because “The resolution of these conflicts is not entirely in Georgia’s hands, as outside powers, especially Russia, wield great influence. To make resolution a precondition for NATO membership would give Russia an effective veto over possible Georgian membership and, in all likelihood, encourage Moscow in its current aggressive policies.”³⁹ Kahka Jibladze, a free-lance reporter in Tbilisi, agrees with the assessment of Yakobashvili and Kulick. He points out that Georgia’s relationship with Moscow was deteriorating as it moved closer to NATO membership.⁴⁰ Jibladze argues that Georgia will be unable to overcome Russia’s influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia without direct support from NATO members.⁴¹

Pierre Razoux of the NATO Defence College believes that Georgia could solve its problems in South Ossetia and Abkhazia by recognizing Abkhazia’s independence in exchange for South Ossetia’s return to solid Georgian control.⁴² The task of overcoming Russia’s influence is unlikely to be that simple. One reason could be Russia’s feelings of insecurity. Andrei Tsyngankov states that Russia “felt increasingly encircled by radical pro-American regimes in the former Soviet region” and the desire (by some former Soviet republics) to join NATO has increased Russia’s “strategic insecurity.”⁴³

These conditions resulted in an increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy. Vladimir Putin expressed Russia’s concerns about NATO expansion in the former Soviet space, which includes Georgia, when he stated, “We view the appearance on our borders

39 Temuri Yakobashvili and Jonothan Kulick. “Can Georgia Join NATO Without solving the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Black Sea Paper Series. No 3, (2007).

40 Kakha Jibladze. “Russia’s Opposition to Georgia’s Quest for NATO Membership.” Central Asia-Caucases Institute Silk Road Studies Program, China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly 5. No 1, (2007), 45.

41 Ibid., 51.

42 Pierre Razoux. What Future for Georgia?. NATO Defense College, Research Paper. No 47, (2009), 8.

43 Stephen K Wegren and Dale R. Herspring, 2010. After Putin’s Russia: past imperfect, future uncertain. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 225.

of a powerful military bloc as a direct threat to the security of our country. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice. National security is not based on promises.”⁴⁴

E. METHODS

This thesis utilizes a qualitative and historical methodology to ascertain and analyze the internal and external variables that affect Georgia’s NATO prospects. Sources include government documents, scholarly articles and press reports. The goal is to assess Georgia’s prospects for membership in NATO by analyzing the domestic and international challenges it faces.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is organized as follows; The introduction describes the thesis topic, research questions and importance of the research. Chapter II discusses Georgia’s Rose Revolution and why NATO membership is important for Georgia. Chapter III examines the internal factors within Georgia, primarily its progress on reforms and the situation with the separatist provinces. Chapter IV analyzes Russia’s opposition to Georgia’s NATO aspirations. Chapter V offers conclusions.

⁴⁴ Press Statement and Answers to Journalists, Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2008/04/04/1949_type82915_163150.shtml (accessed 7 January 2010).

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II. GEORGIA'S DECISION TO SEEK NATO MEMBERSHIP

Georgia is one of the former Soviet republics that defines itself as being Western. Georgians tend to ascribe to the idea of liberal nationalism, which is a belief that Georgians are “first and foremost Georgian and not Soviet, and that its people were ‘western’.”⁴⁵ Predictably, such sentiments remained strong after Georgia gained its independence from the Soviet Union. The popular phrase “I am Georgian therefore I am European,”⁴⁶ coined by the late Zurab Zhvania, who served as Prime Minister of Georgia in 2004–2005, is one such example.

With such a perception among the population it is not surprising that Georgia, having gained its independence, has sought membership in the main Western security institutions, especially NATO. Georgia began its relationship with NATO—via the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and The Partnership for Peace—in the early 90s. However, it was not until after the Rose Revolution in 2003 that Georgia’s efforts to integrate with Western institutions such as NATO intensified.

The Rose Revolution was a watershed moment in Georgian history. It came about for a variety of reasons. From the early to mid 1990s to the early years of the new millennium the republics of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltic States, had grown more authoritarian amidst electoral fraud and manipulation, which had become more commonplace. The situation in Georgia appeared to be moving along that same path until 22–23 November 2003. At that time, a series of nonviolent mass protests known as the Rose Revolution led to the removal of the incumbent president, Eduard Shevardnadze.

⁴⁵ Irakly Areshidze, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007, 117.

⁴⁶ Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch. *Enough The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2005, 104.

The Rose Revolution erupted due to a combination of factors, including a poor economic environment, corruption, and a fragile political situation prior to the 2003 parliamentary elections. These factors created a situation that resulted in an opportunity for members of the opposition.

One observer noted that “severe economic distress ... made the bulk of the population dissatisfied regardless of their political views.”⁴⁷ To further complicate matters only a small elite benefited from privatization and new business startups based on their political connections, namely ties to the president.⁴⁸ Shevardnadze also had to contend with an opposition that was comprised of members who had split from his own party, the Citizens’ Union of Georgia (CUG).⁴⁹ An already unstable environment was made even more so for Shevardnadze due to the presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and pseudo independent television stations.

The Shevardnadze government was accused of large-scale election fraud. The television station Rustavi-2 played a key role in supporting the protesters, as did certain NGOs.⁵⁰ Foreign and Georgian NGOs monitored the elections and conducted exit polls.⁵¹ There were irregularities reported throughout the country. For example, the Marneuli district in southern Georgia was reported to have cast 90 percent of its votes in favor of the CUG while estimates of support in that region were expected to be only 60 to 70 percent.⁵² Additionally, there were reports that people had voted multiple times, that observers from the electoral commissions were thrown out, and that police were

47 Charles H. Fairbanks. “Georgia’s Rose Revolution.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004): 110–124, 111.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 112.

50 United States Institute of Peace Special Report, *Georgias Rose Revolution, A Participants Perspective*, 9.

51 Charles H. Fairbanks. “Georgia’s Rose Revolution.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), 110–124, 115.

52 Ibid.

intimidating people inside the polling stations, among other things.⁵³ It appeared that the electoral commissions were attempting to provide Shevardnadze a parliamentary majority.⁵⁴

The reports of fraud led to anger on the part of the public and belief by the opposition that it had been cheated.⁵⁵ After “ludicrous” results were reported from the Ajara region of the country the number of demonstrators present in the capital city, Tbilisi, swelled toward 100,000 people. Mikheil Saakashvili stood before the crowd and demanded that Shevardnadze resign.⁵⁶ On 22 November 2003, while opening the new Parliament, Shevardnadze was confronted by Saakashvili, a key leader of the opposition, along with a number of supporters. Shevardnadze later resigned.⁵⁷ “The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) disavowed the November election and the courts canceled the results.”⁵⁸ In January 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia by an overwhelming margin.⁵⁹ The Rose Revolution was the vehicle through which Saakashvili came to power in Georgia. From his predecessor he inherited a country that was “riddled by endemic corruption, high levels of poverty and unemployment, a stagnating economy, a huge external debt and a dysfunctional democratic system.”⁶⁰ He also inherited the unresolved conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia which “deprived the Tbilisi Central Authorities of effective control over one fifth of Georgia’s territory.”⁶¹ After taking power Saakashvili set out on an ambitious agenda that included instituting

⁵³ Charles H. Fairbanks. “Georgia’s Rose Revolution.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), 110–124, 115.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Charles H. Fairbanks. “Georgia’s Rose Revolution.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004): 110–124, 116.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁷ Jesse David Tatum. “Democratic Transition in Georgia: Post Revolution Internal Pressures on Leadership,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring 2009): 156–171. 156.

⁵⁸ Charles H. Fairbanks. “Georgia’s Rose Revolution.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), 110–124, 117.

⁵⁹ President of Georgia Biography, available at, <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=1&sm=3> (accessed 20 May 2010).

⁶⁰ Benita Ferrero-Waldner. *Spotlight on Georgia*, London, United Kingdom: Foreign Policy Centre, 2009, 7, <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1079.pdf> (accessed 11 August 2010).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

reforms, tackling corruption, improving the economy, and most importantly “pointing Georgia in the direction of the West.”⁶² He also pledged to regain central government control over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁶³ Saakashvili also desired to integrate Georgia with the West. Obtaining membership in NATO is one of the main considerations in Georgian efforts to integrate with the West.

A. WHY NATO IS IMPORTANT TO GEORGIA

There are several reasons why NATO membership is important for Georgia. NATO is first and foremost a collective defense organization. With that in mind, obtaining membership in the Alliance would provide Georgia with a level of security. Membership in the alliance would provide Georgia with protection under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.” Since Georgia considers Russia to be a threat to its sovereignty, the Russian threat is a major driver behind its membership ambitions.

Joining NATO is certainly a possibility. NATO has had an open door policy for membership since January 1994, in Brussels, when the Heads of State and Government proclaimed:

We ... wish to strengthen ties with the democratic states to our East. We reaffirm that the Alliance, as provided for in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, remains open to membership of other European states in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area. We expect and would welcome NATO expansion

⁶² Jesse David Tatum. “Democratic Transition in Georgia: Post Revolution Internal Pressures on Leadership,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring 2009): 156–171, 157.

⁶³ Jim Nichol. “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests,” *Congressional Research Service*, March 2009, 2.

that would reach to democratic states to our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe.⁶⁴

The Alliance's open door policy remains in effect today. The Allied leaders recently reaffirmed their commitment to an open door policy. Fifteen years later, on 4 December 2009, in Brussels, the Foreign Ministers stated that:

In accordance with Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, NATO's door will remain open to all European democracies which share the values of our Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose inclusion can contribute to common security and stability."⁶⁵

Reaffirming NATO's open door policy is important for an aspiring state such as Georgia.

Another consideration for Georgia is the assistance on reforms provided to aspiring countries by NATO. The Alliance will assist countries in their efforts to make political and military reforms that will enable them to cooperate more effectively with NATO. The 1995 Study on NATO enlargement "concluded that enlargement would contribute to enhanced stability and security for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic area by encouraging and supporting democratic reforms."⁶⁶ On 9 December 2009, during a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC), Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the NATO Secretary General, referred to NATO's support for reforms in Georgia: "NATO has been lending a helping hand, but it is the Georgians who ultimately have to deliver."⁶⁷ His reference to a delivery concerned Georgian efforts at making reforms.

The 1995 NATO Study on Enlargement describes the factors that are considered during the membership process. The study points out that there is "no fixed or rigid list of

⁶⁴ The Process of NATO Enlargement, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb030102.htm> (accessed on June 9).

⁶⁵ Declaration of the Heads of State and Government, Brussels, 10 January 1994, para. 12, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940111a.htm> (accessed 17 August 2010).

⁶⁶ NATO Enlargement, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 10 June 2010).

⁶⁷ Foreign Ministers discuss Georgia's progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_59801.htm?selectedLocale=en, (accessed 9 June 2010).

criteria for inviting new members to join the Alliance.”⁶⁸ However, prospective members are expected to meet certain political and military requirements prior to joining. “These include: a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; the fair treatment of minority populations; a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts; the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to NATO operations; and a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.”⁶⁹ In summary, aspiring members are “expected to meet certain political, economic and military criteria”⁷⁰ in order to join NATO.

The goal of membership in NATO is important for Georgia because it would provide a number of benefits to the country. The drive for membership in NATO provides Georgia with an opportunity to improve its security situation, receive assistance in its efforts to complete the transition from a democratizing post-Soviet state to a consolidated democracy, and move closer to integration with the principal Euro-Atlantic security institutions, NATO and the European Union. Integration in these institutions would represent recognition as a consolidated democratic state.

⁶⁸ Study on NATO Enlargement, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basic/txt/enl-9506.htm> , Chapter 5, para 70 (accessed 23 May 2010).

⁶⁹ NATO Enlargement, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm (accessed 9 June 2010).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

III. POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN GEORGIA

The purpose of this chapter is to remind the reader of Georgia's progress in pursuing political, military, and economic reforms since the Rose Revolution in November 2003. It also analyzes the challenges posed by South Ossetia and Abkhazia as autonomous separatist regions.

A. ECONOMIC REFORMS

Georgia has made exceptional progress in economic reforms. The numerous reforms enacted in Georgia since the Rose Revolution include changes to visa policies and business registrations. Georgia's visa policies allow citizens of selected countries to stay in Georgia without a visa for up to 360 days.⁷¹ Georgia has also improved its business registration process by decreasing the time it takes to register from 30 days to one hour.⁷² These changes to Georgia's visa policies and business registration process have probably contributed to increased growth in Foreign Direct Investment and GDP. Georgia has also made changes to its tax code and customs system as part of its economic reforms. The tax rate was initially 22 percent before it was reduced to 7 percent.⁷³ The belief was that this change would decrease the tax burden on business by 5 percent of GDP. The Georgian Customs System had hampered the overall economy due to rampant corruption. To address this issue the Georgian government simplified the system by abolishing 85 percent of all the previously required permits.⁷⁴ It also limited the amount

⁷¹ James F Collins and Kakha Benukidze, "Georgia Matters," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 23, 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=1284&zoom_highlight=georgia+economic+reform (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Developments in the South Caucasus and Caspian: A Georgian Perspective, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=981> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

of contact between business managers and bureaucrats. In addition to battling corruption, the system is also more efficient. Permits are now received within 30 days and leases are received within 20 days.⁷⁵

These policies have contributed to an improved business climate in the country and have helped it to improve its economic situation. Georgia's economic reform efforts have gained recognition from organizations such as the World Bank. In 2005–2006 Georgia led the World Bank's top ten reformer rankings on the ease of doing business. In a single year Georgia jumped 75 places in the World Bank's "Doing Business" 2007 report.⁷⁶ Georgia's economic performance in terms of ease of doing business since that time has remained strong and the country is currently ranked number 11 in the world behind the United States and the United Kingdom, among others, and in front of Germany and France in the 2010 rankings.⁷⁷

Recognition of Georgia's economic performance was not limited to the World Bank. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) also recognized Georgia's economic improvement. According to the EBRD, "in 2007 real GDP growth was 12.4 percent—up from approximately 9.3 percent in both 2005 and 2006, and markedly better than 5.9 percent in 2004."⁷⁸ Georgia's economy has been affected by the global slowdown, with GDP growth of 2.1 percent in 2008 and contractions of 5.9 percent and 10.7 percent in the first and second quarters of 2009.⁷⁹ Georgia is expected

⁷⁵ Developments in the South Caucasus and Caspian: A Georgian Perspective, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=981> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁷⁶ "Doing Business 2007: Georgia makes an unprecedented jump up the global rankings," World Bank news release, 6 September 2006, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/GEORGIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21043898~menuPK:301751~pagePK:2865066~piPK:2865079~theSitePK:301746,00.html> (accessed 17 June 2010).

⁷⁷ Ranking from the Doing Business 2010 report, <http://www.doingbusiness.org/economyrankings/> (accessed 17 June 2010).

⁷⁸ Jesse David Tatum, "Democratic Transition in Georgia: Post Revolution Internal Pressures on Leadership," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring 2009): 156–171, 162. http://cria-online.org/7_4.html#_ftn57, (accessed 22 July 2010).

⁷⁹ Georgia: Key Development And Challenges, <http://www.ebrd.com/pages/country/georgia/key.shtml> (accessed 22 July 2010).

to experience a modest recovery in 2010.⁸⁰ Its recent economic troubles do not detract from its remarkable economic achievements in such a short time, especially in light of the economic distress that the rest of the world is presently experiencing.

B. DEFENSE REFORM

Georgia has demonstrated varying levels of performance in all of its reforms and its progress in defense reforms has been no different. The 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement states that prospective members will be expected to establish “appropriate democratic and civilian control of their defense force”⁸¹ and to demonstrate that they have the ability to “contribute militarily to collective defense and to the Alliance’s new missions.”⁸² In that regard, Georgia has certainly made progress.

For example, Georgia has demonstrated that it has both the ability and the willingness to make contributions to NATO operations. It has troop deployment experience based on its participation in the NATO-led Kosovo Protection Force.⁸³ Georgia also gained experience operating with the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. At one time Georgia was the third largest contributor of troops.⁸⁴

Although the Iraq mission was not NATO-led, many of the coalition forces operating there were members of the Alliance, which allowed Georgia to gain valuable experience. As one observer noted, “Georgia forces in Iraq were not merely guarding bases – they were controlling an entire province of the country on behalf of the U.S.-led coalition there and were conducting full-scale combat operations, albeit with significant

⁸⁰ Georgia: Key Development And Challenges, <http://www.ebrd.com/pages/country/georgia/key.shtml> (accessed 22 July 2010).

⁸¹ Study on NATO Enlargement, Chapter 5, para. 72, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9506.htm> (accessed 6 October 2010).

⁸² Study on NATO Enlargement, Chapter 5, para. 75, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9506.htm> (accessed 6 October 2010).

⁸³ Travis L. Bounds and Ryan C. Hendrickson. “Georgian Membership in NATO: Policy Implications of the Bucharest Summit,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, 2009, 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

U.S. assistance in certain areas.”⁸⁵ Georgia has also recently contributed forces to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, where it has about 950 soldiers in Helmand Province.⁸⁶ Participation in these operations demonstrates an ability and willingness to contribute to NATO operations and also allows Georgia to highlight its military modernization and training.

Georgia’s progress to date is notable, especially when one considers the point at which Georgia began. Georgia’s military situation was poor when compared to other post-Soviet states. It had “few personnel serving in the Soviet military, and of these, even fewer served as officers in combat units.”⁸⁷ Georgia had to “attempt to form new units with cast-off Soviet equipment and ammunition,” and “with relatively few experienced personnel to train and lead their units.”⁸⁸ To further complicate matters, the Georgians had to fight two conflicts within their own boundaries when Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared independence. The improvements in the Georgian military began when it joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace in 1994, and noticeable progress was apparent after Georgia started receiving support via the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) in 2002. It was at this time, one observer remarked, that meaningful Western assistance began.⁸⁹

Yet other observers remain unsupportive of Georgia’s candidacy for membership in NATO. They acknowledge that Georgia’s deployment experiences make it unique when compared to other applicants for NATO membership but hold that these experiences are offset by what they consider to be the limited benefits that Georgia could

⁸⁵ Robert E. Hamilton. *Georgian Military Reform – An Alternative View*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009, 1, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090203_hamilton_militaryreform.pdf (accessed 21 September 2010).

⁸⁶ Joshua Kucera, “Georgia Loses its first Soldier in Afghanistan,” *Eurasianet*, September 8, 2010. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61877> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Wright. “Defense Reform and the Caucasus Challenges of Institutional Reform During Unresolved Conflict.” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 2009, 24.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Robert E. Hamilton. “Georgian Military Reform – An Alternative view,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2009, 1.

offer to the alliance, especially in light of the 2008 war in Georgia.⁹⁰ In response to comments on Georgia's defeat during the war with Russia, one supporter of Georgian membership in NATO has argued that,

...if defeating the Russian military with no outside assistance is a litmus test for NATO membership, most of NATO's current 26 members would be retroactively disqualified. The whole point of collective security is to meet threats together.⁹¹

It is difficult to deny that Georgia has demonstrated that it has the ability and willingness to make a contribution to NATO operations. Georgia has also demonstrated a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures. Proof to that effect can be seen in Georgia's Ministry of Defense. In 1999 Georgia's defense forces had seven independent branches: the Armed Forces, the National Guard, the Border Guards, the Interior Troops, the Independent Assault Brigade, the Police Special Duties Unit, and the Special Service for the Protection of the State.⁹² Under this arrangement state control was problematic because, according to David J. Smith, an American member of the International Security Advisory Board (ISAB), which is an advisory committee of the U.S. Department of State, "individuals used these private forces as their own power bases to pursue personal agendas."⁹³ A failure to solve this issue would have certainly precluded Georgia from being able to contribute to NATO operations. To solve this problem, "[t]he National Guard and the Independent Assault Brigade have been folded into the Georgian Armed Forces within the Ministry of Defense. Meanwhile, the Border Guards and Police Special Duties Unit have come under the Interior Ministry's control."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Travis L. Bounds and Ryan C. Hendrickson. "Georgian Membership in NATO: Policy Implications of the Bucharest Summit," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2009, 29.

⁹¹ Robert E. Hamilton, 2.

⁹² Eric Miller, "International Advisory Body Offers Praise For Georgia's Defense Reform Efforts," Eurasianet, May 2, 2005. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav50305.shtml> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁹³ Smith quoted in Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Georgia has also improved democratic oversight of civil-military relations. According to a 2006 report by the International Security Advisory Board, “The role of Parliament in the democratic oversight of the security sector has been strengthened. ... A civilian Minister of Defence now leads a civilian MOD, separate from the General Staff.” Moreover, “In December 2004 the Law on Defense of Georgia defined the roles of the President, the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence.”⁹⁵ These arrangements contribute to democratic and civilian control over the Georgian defense forces.

The reforms previously mentioned did not include all the reforms that Georgia undertook as part of its efforts to improve its prospects for NATO membership. It should be understood that, although NATO is a collective defense organization, defense capabilities are not the sole important consideration for a prospective member. Support for this line of thinking can be found in what Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, then the NATO Secretary-General, said in a speech at Tbilisi State University in October 2007: “Contrary to what people may think, modernisation of the defence and security sector is not all that NATO is interested in. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite is true.... When assessing progress in Georgia, NATO has looked, and will continue to look, at the whole reform picture, and not just the military dimension.”⁹⁶ Georgia’s reforms were reviewed primarily to draw attention to the efforts that Georgia has made in this regard.

C. POLITICAL REFORM: TRANSITIONING TO DEMOCRACY

The picture presented by Georgia’s progress on political reforms is not as rosy as that concerning economic reforms and defense reform. While Georgia’s economic reform programs have been regarded as successful as well as key defense reforms, the country’s political reforms remain a work in progress.

⁹⁵ ISAB Report 2006, para. 15, http://www.gfsis.net/gsac/eng/resources/ISAB_REPORT_2006.pdf (accessed 20 September 2010).

⁹⁶ Speech by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s071004a.html> (accessed 22 September 2010).

Some observers have stated that “genuine progress and successful state-building”⁹⁷ relative to democratic development in Georgia occurred mostly in the period from November 2003 to November 2007. The democratic advances in this period had shortcomings, as there were “clear problems with democracy in Georgia”⁹⁸ during that time. According to Alexander Cooley and Lincoln Mitchell, these problems included “[t]he constitutional amendments, the emergence of a one-party system with strong ties between the ruling party and the state, a less-free media climate, the government’s willingness to manipulate the election law, and its persistent tendency to cut democratic corners in order to expedite its legislative reforms.”⁹⁹ Several of these pre-2007 problems, including the one-party system and the troubled media climate, persist.

D. ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE GEORGIAN CONSTITUTION

Critical observers have raised a number of issues associated with the Georgian constitution that was adopted on 5 February 2004. First among those issues is the way in which it was approved. Some observers argue that it was rushed through parliament without an opportunity for “public input or review” during the two weeks between Saakashvili’s election and when he officially took office.¹⁰⁰ “Members of parliament were reportedly coerced to support the amendments.”¹⁰¹

Two amendments in particular drew a large amount of criticism. The amendment establishing the post of prime minister allowed for this person to be appointed by the president and approved by the parliament. This procedure has been viewed as unsatisfactory, owing to the domination of the parliament by Saakashvili and his followers. The second amendment that drew criticism allowed the president to dissolve parliament if it “failed to express confidence in a newly-appointed government on three

⁹⁷ Alexander Cooley, Lincoln Mitchell, “Georgia: The Interconnections between Democracy and Security,” *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 17 (21 May 2010), 3.
<http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/cad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=116564> (accessed 22 June 2010).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln Mitchell. “Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution,” *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), 669–676, 672.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

successive occasions or if it failed to approve the state budget.”¹⁰² This procedure has been deplored as giving excessive power to the president. Critics charged that the amendments were “undemocratic” and pushed “private and party interests at the expense of state interests” and “gave the executive branch the power to bulldoze through their decisions irrespective of the will of Parliament.”¹⁰³

Some observers hold that the executive branch has acquired too much power, while others maintain that there are benefits to allowing the executive to wield immense power. The latter argue that the decision to concentrate power in the hands of the president is not entirely bad because “[t]he strengthening of presidential powers and weakening of those of the parliament has had both positive and negative consequences for the country.”¹⁰⁴ One of the positive results, for example, is that “the broader executive powers allowed the government to drastically reduce redundancies and improved its ability to maintain financial order.”¹⁰⁵

The Georgian Constitution has been amended five times since 2004. Some of the changes diminished the power of the president, while others increased his control. For example, a change in 2006 limited the president’s authority to appoint and dismiss judges while another change in 2008 gave him the power to dismiss the justice, interior, and defense ministers.¹⁰⁶ The Georgian Constitution was only one of several factors that provided the president with significant authority and power. He also maintained power through his party, which dominated and continues to dominate parliament, and through his media advantage over the opposition.

¹⁰² Jonathan Wheatley. *Georgia From National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005, 194.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Papava. “The Political Economy of Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), 656–667, 661.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ New Draft Georgian Constitution Unveiled, http://www.rferl.org/content/New_Draft_Georgian_Constitution_Unveiled_/2040257.html (accessed 23 July 2010).

E. ONE-PARTY DOMINANCE AND MANIPULATION OF ELECTION LAWS

Elections in Georgia are freer than at any time in the country's history. In 2006, Lincoln Mitchell stated that, "fair elections are now the rule."¹⁰⁷ Three years later he updated his assessment with the comment that "The primary area where democratic advances have been made in Georgia since the Rose Revolution is in elections."¹⁰⁸ Yet, problems remain that serve as a hindrance to Georgian democratic development. Among those problems are one-party dominance, the manipulation of election laws, the great power vested in the president via the constitution, and the legislative process. These problems collectively cast a negative light over Georgia's democratic development. More importantly these issues potentially weaken Georgia's credibility as a candidate for NATO membership.

Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) has been the sole party in power since the first elections were held in Georgia in 2004 after the Rose Revolution. The UNM still dominates the parliament based on the number of seats that are held by its membership. During the elections held in 2004 and 2008 members of the UNM were hand picked by Georgian President Saakashvili, to whom they remain loyal. The loyalty afforded to Saakashvili from members of his party in Parliament provides him with significant influence and power over the direction of his country, which in itself is not necessarily bad. However, it becomes an issue when the president does not have to face any dissent from within the government.

It is not uncommon for one party to dominate various branches of government in a democracy. An area of concern in Georgia is the perceived lack of a distinction between the ruling party and the government. The lack of "effort to strengthen the distinctions between ruling party and government"¹⁰⁹ by the UNM has led some observers to point to

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution," *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), 669–676, 672.

¹⁰⁸ Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 91.

¹⁰⁹ Lincoln Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution," *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), 669–676, 673.

it as a reason behind Georgia's troubled democratic development. Party membership or support from the party "is still viewed as a prerequisite to any position of power."¹¹⁰ The UNM leadership also considers itself to be "the only democratizing force in Georgia and has openly questioned the need for opposition from outside the UNM."¹¹¹ When combined with changes made to the Constitution that "effectively removed many of the checks and balances in the political system and allowed for a rule by presidential decree rather than passing legislation through a parliamentary process,"¹¹² the result is the appearance of a one-party state. Repressed dissent in Parliament, a lack of distinctions between the ruling party and the government, and the ability to rule by presidential decree are not ideal characteristics for a state seeking to further its democratic development.

The danger posed by one-party dominance was recognized by a group of Georgian intellectuals during the first half of Saakashvili's initial term. This group published an open letter to Saakashvili on 14 October 2004:

Mr. President

Almost one year has passed since the famous developments of October-November 2003. The anniversary of 'the rose revolution' gives us a handle to analyze the ongoing processes, as well as to judge on the achievements or mistakes of the authorities.

Since 1990 the Georgian society stands a good chance of establishing as a unity of free citizens. For the first time during past years the country has the authorities, which enjoy support of a significant part of the population. At the same time, both the Government and the Parliament of Georgia are functioning under conditions of absence of well-organized political opposition, which has a serious influence on the public-political processes. Under such circumstances, the President, the executive government and

¹¹⁰ Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 92.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Svante E Cornell and Niklas Nilsson. "Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War." *Democratizatsiya*, (Summer 2009), 251–267, 253.
<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2009/Cornell-Nilsson-DEM.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2010).

the ruling party should assume greater responsibility to protect the key attributes of the country, such as freedom of speech and political pluralism.

Unfortunately, alarming developments in Georgian politics made us to send this appeal to you – the President of the country and unilateral leader of the ruling party [National Movement]. Intolerance towards people with different opinions is being planted in Georgian politics and in other spheres of social life (business, education, science, culture, sport). Leaders and officials of the ruling party constantly use the labels introduced at dawn of establishment of Georgian democracy, in the eighties of last century, such as: “the enemy of the nation, traitor, the fifth column,” etc. The recent political debates conducted in the Parliament can clearly confirm this. The disease, which split the Georgian society 15 years ago and led the country to a civil war, has resurfaced. We are extremely concerned, particularly over the fact that in your recent public speeches there are more and more humiliating and insulting statements towards the opponents.

Mr. President

It is a dangerous illusion, that by using these forms of pressure on the people with different opinion, the authorities will manage to consolidate the society in order to implement necessary reforms in the country. Attempts to establish an intellectual dictatorship and mono-opinion will lead the country not to prompt reforms, but to an authoritarian rule and stagnation. The freedom of expression of alternative opinion and discussion is not only a cornerstone of stable, democratic development of the country, but also protects the authorities against making hasty, unprepared decisions. Planting aggressive and insulting manners into debate and discussions, as well as ignorance of fundamental human rights, against the background of difficult social-economic problems, will not lead to the society’s consolidation. Instead, the political opposition may transform into into severe personal confrontation. The opponents of the Georgian state always managed to profit by this factor. We have witnessed such facts in our recent history.

Mr. Saakashvili

You, as the President of Georgia and the Leader of the ruling party, are especially responsible for establishing the normal political environment in the country. The rift and confrontation within the society may lead to

catastrophic consequences for Georgia. We call on you to use all the existing levers to avoid the development of undesirable processes in the country.¹¹³

Actions by the UNM long after the above letter was written to President Saakashvili suggest that the “absence of a well-organized opposition,” a lack of “political pluralism,” “intolerance toward people with different opinions,” and the use of “labels” such as “the enemy of the nation, traitor, the fifth column,”¹¹⁴ to keep the opposition locked out of power remain the norm and help in part to explain how the UNM continues to maintain its dominance over Georgian politics.

For example, prior to elections in 2006 Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili complained about the lack of an opposition in a speech to the European Parliament.

Perhaps one of my biggest regrets to date, however, is the fact that Georgia still does not have a robust and constructive opposition. ... I can only hope that Georgia's opposition parties will become more vigorous, as well as more responsible and more competent, testing the government, and one day (but not that soon) prevail in open and fair elections. We have certainly established a political and legal environment in which this can happen – now they must take the next step.¹¹⁵

More recently, during municipal elections held during Summer 2010 the use of labels such as “enemy of the nation, traitor, and fifth column” were modified and used against the opposition. This resulted in them being “intimidated to some extent, and thrown onto the defensive by efforts to label them as Russian agents.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Letter To His Excellency, the President of Georgia, Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8100>, (accessed 26 August 2010).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Remarks H.E. The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili European Parliament Strasbourg - 14 November, 2006, http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=228&info_id=4761 (accessed 27 August 2010).

¹¹⁶ Fred Weir, “Georgia elections a triumph for Saakashvili,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 1, 2010. [http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0601/Georgia-elections-a-triumph-for-Saakashvili/\(page\)/2](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0601/Georgia-elections-a-triumph-for-Saakashvili/(page)/2) (accessed 27 August 2010).

These events show that some Georgian citizens were perceptive about the actions of the government and arguably demonstrated a level of prescience related to the risks of one-party domination. They evidently did not foresee how the UNM would use additional tactics to maintain one-party dominance.

Elections in Georgia from the Rose Revolution to the present have been considered free. However, they have not been very competitive. Shortly after the Rose Revolution, elections were uncompetitive because a strong opposition had failed to emerge; but that is only a “partial explanation.”¹¹⁷ The major reason that elections have been uncompetitive is that the UNM has “manipulated elections in very clever, and legal, ways to ensure victory.”¹¹⁸

The UNM manipulated election laws to increase its probability of winning on the local and national levels. The changes made to election laws for the October 2006 local elections were “viewed by the opposition and many independent civic organizations as an effort to ensure a large majority for the UNM in local government councils throughout Georgia, most critically in Tbilisi.”¹¹⁹ There is evidence to support their views. Parliament passed a law during the spring of 2006 that “called for a mixed system for selecting the Tbilisi city council.”¹²⁰ This new system would prevent candidates who were popular but not affiliated with the UNM from getting elected by mandating that the Tbilisi city council be drawn partially from a party list and partially from a multi-member system with the winner getting all the seats in particular districts.¹²¹ The result was the UNM gaining 92 percent of the seats while garnering only 67 percent of the vote.¹²² Additionally, the new law called for the Mayor of Tbilisi “to be selected by and from the

¹¹⁷ Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009): 94.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 94–95.

newly elected council members.”¹²³ This provision is not in line with Saakashvili’s demands before the Rose Revolution when he was a member of the opposition. In addition to ensuring that the UNM maintained dominance in government, preventing the opposition from winning the job as mayor of Tbilisi allowed Saakashvili to protect his presidency from a potential competitor. The position of mayor of Tbilisi is visible and important. In addition to Tbilisi being the “cultural, political, and economic capital” of Georgia, it is also home to nearly half of the country’s population.

After the UNM’s local victories the party turned its attention to national elections for Parliament and the office of the President. Again the UNM resorted to manipulation of election laws. Initially parliamentary elections were scheduled to occur in 2008 and presidential elections in 2009, but the Parliament “altered the constitution so that the president and parliament would be elected together.”¹²⁴ The opposition wanted elections to be held in accordance with the constitution. To do so would allow them an opportunity to become a check on Saakashvili because his party was losing support at the time.¹²⁵ Saakashvili went on to win the presidential contest on 5 January 2008 with 53 percent of the vote. His next closest competitor, opposition candidate Levan Gachechiladze, earned only 25 percent of the vote.¹²⁶

The parliamentary elections were held in May 2008 and the UNM won 59 percent of the vote, which earned the party 119 seats. The United Opposition led by former presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze earned only 17 percent of the vote and 17 seats.¹²⁷ UNM victories in the parliament allowed Saakashvili to maintain a constitutional majority, and avoid any checks on his authority as a “super executive.”¹²⁸

123 Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia’s Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009): 95.

124 Ibid.

125 Jesse David Tatum, “Democratic Transition in Georgia: Post Revolution Internal Pressures on Leadership,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring 2009): 156–171, 163.

126 Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia’s Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009): 96.

127 Ibid., 164.

128 Ibid.

It also preserved the status quo in Georgia. The decision to change the order of the elections was key because it allowed the UNM to ride Saakashvili's coat tails to victory.

Oddly enough, electoral manipulation may not have been necessary. Lincoln Mitchell wrote, "One reason these electoral manipulations are so surprising is that they not only are somehow undemocratic, but are so politically unnecessary for Saakashvili and his party. Losing a few seats in the local legislatures, or even the national parliament would not significantly hurt the government. It would more likely show its strength, as even if the playing field were uneven in favor of the opposition, the government would still win."¹²⁹ There is truth in the preceding statement because the UNM has many advantages over the opposition. Its success in maintaining power is also based on the support of the media, which in many recognized circles is not considered to be free.

F. LACK OF MEDIA FREEDOM

Questions about media freedom in Georgia have been raised by non-governmental organizations, the Georgian political opposition, and scholars. The Georgian Constitution states, "The mass media shall be free. The censorship shall be impermissible." It also states that "Neither the state nor particular individuals shall have the right to monopolise mass media or means of dissemination of information."¹³⁰

Having such freedoms codified into law makes it easy to see why Georgia "used to get the best marks in the Caucasus on its respect for press freedom."¹³¹ Legally (on paper that is) the press in Georgia is freer than in neighboring countries. However, the relationship between the media and the government is not conducive to democracy.

NGOs such as Freedom House and Human Rights Watch have raised questions about the level of media freedom in Georgia. Freedom House, in 2009, rated media

¹²⁹ Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009): 97.

¹³⁰ The Constitution of Georgia, Article 24, para 2 and 3, http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf (accessed 28 August 2010).

¹³¹ Elsa Vidal, "Georgia: News Media and Press Freedom Badly Hit by Partisan Struggles," in *Spotlight on Georgia*, Foreign Policy Centre, <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1079.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2010) 41.

freedom in Georgia as “partly free” based on a score of 60 out of 100.¹³² Freedom House’s methodology considers lower scores better scores. It is worth noting that a score of 61 would have resulted in Georgia’s rating falling from the middle category of “partly free” to the lowest category of “not free.”

The issues cited by Freedom House include increased government control over the media, the government’s refusal to allow members of the parliamentary opposition to sit on the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), the government’s restrictions on analytical and talk shows, and reports of physical threats and assaults against members of the media.¹³³ In addition to several of the issues raised by Freedom House, Human Rights Watch also cites a lack of television broadcasting outside of state-owned stations and pro-government television stations like Rustavi-2 and Imedi.¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch also points out that there is a lack of transparency in media ownership.¹³⁵

Although Georgia has a vast amount of print media, problems with televised media receive the most attention because the majority of Georgian citizens receive their information from television. The situation with the Imedi television station is of interest because it suggests a willingness on the part of the government to silence its critics. Imedi was once the most popular of three privately owned stations in Georgia. In November 2007 it was closed by Georgian authorities after it broadcast footage of police using force to break up a group of protesters who were calling for the resignation of President Saakashvili.¹³⁶ When Imedi returned to the air, the tone of its contents was such that it was referred to as “Rustavi 3, after the pro-government Rustavi-2.”¹³⁷

¹³² Freedom House Map of Freedom, Georgia 2009, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009> (accessed 29 July 2010).

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch World Report – Georgia 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2010/georgia> (accessed 28 July 2010)

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Elsa Vidal, “Georgia: News Media and Press Freedom Badly Hit by Partisan Struggles,” in Spotlight on Georgia, Foreign Policy Centre, <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1079.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2010), 41.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 42.

The lack of a press that is free to provide a diversity of ideas and positions is not conducive to democratic development. Yet, somehow despite significant setbacks and government interference, the media in Georgia maintains the trust of nearly half of the population.¹³⁸ An unfortunate side effect of this trust is that it contributes to the UNM's ability to influence perceptions in the country and maintain control. It thus hinders the development of a robust and responsible democratic opposition.

Georgia's efforts at democratization have come a long way since 2003. On that point there is general agreement among observers of politics in Georgia. However, that does not mean that Tbilisi can rest on its laurels, especially since it desires NATO membership. The issues that Tbilisi is facing may be viewed as growing pains associated with its drive toward democratization. Other post-Soviet states, some of which are members of NATO, have also had to overcome issues and challenges as they made democratic transitions. The Georgian government must continue to make efforts to improve its level of democratic development. As mentioned earlier, the level of democratic development of a prospective NATO member is an important membership consideration.

Oddly enough, this was not always the case. NATO in the past allowed states to become (or to remain) members that were not considered to be democratic states. Portugal, Turkey, and Greece are examples of allies that have not always been democracies while members of the Alliance.

When the Alliance was formed, Portugal was governed by a dictatorship little different from that in Spain. ... Similarly, when Greece was ruled by a military junta in 1967–74 and when Turkey was governed by the military on various occasions (1960–61, 1971–73, and 1980–83), there was never any question of refusing to conduct Alliance business with the nondemocratic regimes or of expelling these countries from the Alliance.”¹³⁹ These nations were allowed to become or remain NATO members because of perceived security requirements. During the Cold

138 Fulya Ozerkan, “Georgian Media Most Trusted in Caucasus, poll reveals,” *Hurriyet*, November 12, 2009, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=georgian-media-most-trusted-in-caucasus-poll-unveils-2009-11-11 (accessed 28 July 2010)

139 David Yost. *NATO Transformed: The Alliances New Role in International Security*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998): 71.

War, democratization was not as vital a criterion for membership as military strength or geostrategic location.

Threat perceptions, however, have been drastically reduced since the collapse of the Soviet empire. Evidently, the Allies now feel freer to make democratization a requirement for membership.¹⁴⁰

That means that in the contemporary environment democratization is a major consideration. To increase the complexity of the situation, a prospective member cannot join the North Atlantic Alliance without the unanimous consent of all members. At present it is unlikely that all Alliance members would vote to admit Georgia into the Alliance, and not only because questions about its democratic development remain. As a result, Georgia will have to continue to strive toward improving the freedom of the media, leveling the playing field for the opposition, and increasing the distinctions between the UNM party and the state.

The situation is not as dire as it appears because Georgia does maintain some support from key members of the Alliance, including the United States, for its efforts to democratize. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden spoke before the Georgian Parliament in July 2009: “Your Rose Revolution will only be complete when government is transparent, accountable, and fully participatory; when issues are debated inside this chamber, not only out on the streets; when you fully address key constitutional issues regarding the balance of power between the parliament and the executive branch, and leveling your electoral playing field; when the media is totally independent and professional, providing people the information to make informed decisions, and to hold their government accountable for the decisions it makes; when the courts are free from outside influence and the rule of law is firmly established, and when the transfer of power occurs through peaceful, constitutional, and democratic processes, not on the street.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ David Yost. *NATO Transformed: The Alliances New Role in International Security*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998): 71–72.

¹⁴¹ Remarks by the Vice President to the Georgian Parliament, 23 July 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-The-Vice-President-To-The-Georgian-Parliament/ (accessed 29 July 2010).

Democracy in Georgia is not perfect, and much work remains if it is to progress from being considered a “young and immature democracy”¹⁴² toward becoming a consolidated democracy. Efforts to improve Georgia’s performance concerning democratization would go a long way toward increasing the country’s attractiveness and improving its prospects for membership. If Georgia fails to make progress on democratization, there is a distinct possibility that its prospects for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance will remain in limbo for the foreseeable future.

G. SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

The troubled status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may represent the most formidable challenge of the many that Tbilisi must overcome in Georgia’s bid for NATO membership. The central government lacks control of these regions, which are both within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia. Russia’s deepening relationship with South Ossetia and Abkhazia presents a major challenge for Tbilisi.

Tbilisi’s difficult relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia began as an internal issue during the last days of the Soviet Union. The pending breakup of the Soviet Union led to aspirations for independence not only in Georgia but in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well. The aspirations for independence among the three parties developed into a situation that was ripe to be exploited by Russia in a manner that was detrimental to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and especially Georgia.

South Ossetia was the first of the two provinces to seek independence. In November 1989 the authorities in what was then the oblast of South Ossetia unilaterally declared South Ossetia an autonomous republic.¹⁴³ They also declared their intent to unite with North Ossetia, which is a part of Russia.¹⁴⁴ The response from the Georgian

¹⁴² Svante E. Cornell and Niklas Nilsson. “Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War.” *Democratizatsiya*, (Summer 2009), 251–267, 251.
<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2009/Cornell-Nilsson-DEM.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2010).

¹⁴³ Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud. “Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nationbuilding in South Caucasian Quasi-States,” *Europe Asia Studies*, NUPI (2008), 488.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

authorities was to call the declaration by the South Ossetians unconstitutional.¹⁴⁵ Undeterred, in September 1990 the South Ossetian parliament “adopted a declaration on sovereignty and republican status.” South Ossetia held its own parliamentary elections in December 1990, after having boycotted the Georgian elections one month earlier.¹⁴⁶ The response from Tbilisi was to abolish South Ossetian autonomy and to deploy national guard and police units whose task was to restore order. This resulted in a civil war that lasted until June 1992.¹⁴⁷ The war ended after a cease-fire agreement authorized the introduction of Russian peacekeepers.¹⁴⁸

Unlike the South Ossetians, who are separated by an artificial boundary from their ethnic kin in North Ossetia, the Abkhazians as an ethnic group are consolidated in one territory.¹⁴⁹ This circumstance may be a contributing factor behind what some observers have referred to as an “unequivocal ... desire for independence from Russia and Georgia.” This is a contrast to the South Ossetians, who have not made it clear whether they want independence, or to merge with North Ossetia and become a part of Russia. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been subjected to virtual annexation by Russia, particularly since August 2008.

The Abkhazians asserted their independence from Georgia with a formal declaration in 1990, which was annulled by the Georgian authorities.¹⁵⁰ In February 1992, authorities in Georgia restored the 1921 pre-Soviet constitution, an act which Abkhazians viewed as an attack on their autonomous status. This led them to declare independence once again.¹⁵¹ Tbilisi responded as it had regarding South Ossetia by

145 Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud. “Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nationbuilding in South Caucasian Quasi-States,” *Europe Asia Studies*, NUPI (2008), 488.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Miriam Lansky and Giorgi Areshidze. “Georgias Year of Turmoil.” *Journal of Democracy*, (October 2008), 156.

149 Shireen T. Hunter. “Border, Conflict, and Security in the Caucasus.” *SAIS Review*, (2006), 117.

150 Shireen T. Hunter. “Border, Conflict, and Security in the Caucasus.” *SAIS Review*, (2006), 117.

151 Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud. “Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nationbuilding in South Caucasian Quasi-States.” *Europe Asia Studies*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, (2008), 486.

sending in troops to restore order.¹⁵² Georgian troops initially had success, but they were pushed back by Abkhazian and Russian “volunteers” who reclaimed the capital, Sukhumi.¹⁵³ In April 1994, Georgian and Abkhazian authorities signed a declaration that was originally brokered by the UN in July 1993. This declaration committed them to strictly observe a cease-fire and to allow for the return of displaced persons.¹⁵⁴ The two sides signed another agreement with Moscow one month later that established a “demilitarized zone along the banks of the Inguri River—which divides Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia—to be overseen by a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) force that was overwhelmingly Russian.”¹⁵⁵

The drives for independence from Georgia by South Ossetia and Abkhazia are significant in that the ensuing conflicts during the early 1990s allowed Russia to gain and maintain military footholds within Georgia via “peacekeeping” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. From these footholds Russia has been able to deepen its ties with both quasi-states with the overall affect being denial of sovereignty to Georgia.

Russia’s grip on South Ossetia and Abkhazia has increased significantly since the August 2008 war. On 12 August 2008, Russia and Georgia agreed to a cease-fire brokered by President Sarkozy of France.¹⁵⁶ Less than a month later, a Russian defense official declared that Moscow planned to deploy 7,600 troops to the breakaway regions. This represented double the number of forces there prior to the war.¹⁵⁷ Less than a week after this announcement concerning the additional forces, Russia signed military cooperation agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia for a term of 49 years with an

¹⁵² Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud. “Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nationbuilding in South Caucasian Quasi-States.” *Europe Asia Studies*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, (2008), 486.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Shireen T. Hunter. “Border, Conflict, and Security in the Caucasus.” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1(2006), 118.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Corey Flintoff and Alice Kreit, “Sarkozy: Russia, Georgia Agree to a cease-fire plan,” *NPR*, August 12, 2008. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93522334> (accessed 20 September 2010).

¹⁵⁷ Conor Sweeney and Oleg Schedrov, “Russia plans 7600 force in Georgia rebel regions,” *Reuters*, September 8, 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKL935886020080909> (accessed 20 September 2010).

option to extend for five-year increments after the initial term.¹⁵⁸ The agreements authorized Russia to build bases and position troops in the two regions.

According to the International Crisis Group, official estimates place 3,800 Russian troops in South Ossetia, with most located in Tskhinvali, Java, and Kanchaveti.¹⁵⁹ The bases are situated in elevated positions on key terrain that some observers believe will allow Russia to dominate substantial parts of Georgia while being positioned only 50 kilometers from Tbilisi.¹⁶⁰ The positioning of these troops also poses a threat to the east-west highway that was temporarily seized by Russian troops during the August 2008 war.¹⁶¹ Georgian officials believe that the location of these troops would allow Russia to accomplish in an hour what took them days in August 2008. There is a comparable number of troops stationed in Abkhazia, with estimates ranging from 4,000 to 5,000. In Abkhazia, the Russian forces provide Moscow with options to maintain influence over Georgia and to project naval power useful for confronting other threats. Russia plans to build a Black Sea naval base in the town of Ochamchire that will serve as a hedge should it lose its access to the strategic and historic base of Sevastopol, which is home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet.¹⁶² Russia also positioned its S300 advanced missile system in Abkhazia in August 2010.¹⁶³

One of the declared reasons for these actions is the oft-repeated claim by Russia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia that Georgia continues to pose a threat to the separatist regions and is engaged in an arms build up in preparation for a resumption of hostilities. The Georgian government has denied these accusations, and its denials are supported by statements from the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) observers who conduct regular patrols between the entities as well as by a drastic cut of more than

¹⁵⁸ Moscow signs defense pacts with breakaway Georgian Regions, Rferl, http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow_Threatens_To_Seize_Georgian_Ships_Signs_Defense_Pacts_With_Breakaway_Regions/1823404.html (accessed 20 September 2010).

¹⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, "South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition," (June 2010), 8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia Deepening Dependence," (February 2010), 4.

¹⁶³ Russia Deploys Missiles in Breakaway Region of Abkhazia, BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-10940297> (accessed 20 September 2010).

50 percent in the Georgian military budget for 2010.¹⁶⁴ Both the lack of activity and the defense budget cutback are supportive of Georgia's response and suggest that the claims of the other parties are baseless.

While the deepening military relationship between Russia and the two breakaway regions is certainly a cause for concern, it does not tell the whole story. Russia has also been deepening its economic ties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In addition to the military support provided, both regions are heavily dependent on Russia for financial aid and investment. Russia provides nearly half of Abkhazia's state budget of \$128 million and accounts for 99 percent of its foreign investment while also serving as its largest trading partner.¹⁶⁵ Russia provided approximately \$137 million of the \$140 million South Ossetian budget in 2010, and Russia is also the largest trading partner for South Ossetia.¹⁶⁶ The "unstable security situation, underdeveloped legal framework and high level of corruption" in South Ossetia have resulted in almost no private investment in the country.¹⁶⁷ Despite their varying levels of support from Russia, the most notable similarity between the two regions is their reliance on Russia for economic and political survival.

The prospects of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for either true independence or reintegration with Georgia are doubtful in the foreseeable future. One factor is the problem of their recognition by Russia. Both countries were recognized as independent from Georgia by Russia on 26 August 2008 via an announcement by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev:

The Presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, based on the results of the referendums conducted and on the decisions taken by the Parliaments of the two republics, appealed to Russia to recognize the state sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Federation Council and the State Duma voted in support of those appeals. A decision needs to be taken based on the situation on the ground. Considering the freely expressed will of the Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples and being guided by the provisions of the

¹⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia Deepening Dependence," (February 2010), 5

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 5–6.

¹⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, "South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition," (June 2010), 4.

¹⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, "South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition," (June 2010), 4.

UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on the Principles of International Law Governing Friendly Relations Between States, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and other fundamental international instruments, I signed Decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence.¹⁶⁸

Russia's recognition was followed by that of Nicaragua¹⁶⁹ and Venezuela¹⁷⁰ in September 2009 and by the small island nation of Nauru in December 2009.¹⁷¹

The recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence by Russia was met with condemnation from NATO countries. The NATO Allies declared that "Russia's decision violates the many UN Security Council resolutions it has endorsed regarding Georgia's territorial integrity, and is inconsistent with the fundamental OSCE principles on which stability in Europe is based."¹⁷² The NATO Allies continue to support Georgia's sovereignty by recognizing both regions as being part of Georgia.¹⁷³

The lack of recognition by most governments left South Ossetia and Abkhazia with little choice but to improve their ties with Russia, especially since neither entity wished to be reconciled with Georgia. There is also the issue of economic dependency, particularly in the case of South Ossetia, which is not economically viable without Russian aid. This situation does not bode well for Georgia's NATO membership ambitions. Russia's involvement in the breakaway regions puts the Allies in a position in which they must determine if the prospect of bringing Georgia further along in the

168 Statement by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, 26 August 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/1543_type82912_205752.shtml (accessed 20 September 2010).

169 Reuters, Nicaragua recognizes South Ossetia and Abkhazia, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKN0330438620080903> (accessed 20 September 2010).

170 Venezuela's Chavez draws closer to Moscow, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5891W020090910> (accessed September 20 2010).

171 Tiny Nauru struts world stage by recognizing breakaway republics, *Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/14/nauro-recognises-abkhazia-south-ossetia> (accessed 7 October 2010).

172 Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia Regions of Georgia, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-108e.html> (accessed 20 September 2010).

173 Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration, para. 31, 32, 34, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm (accessed on October 7 2010).

process for membership is worth the risk of being forced to confront Russia, which has drawn a clear line in the sand in the South Caucasus based on its actions in the region.

For Georgia, the challenges associated with regaining control over the autonomous republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been and will remain severe even with support from most of the member states of the United Nations. Russia has no incentive to change course regarding Georgia and the breakaway regions. Increased involvement by Moscow and the accompanying tightening relationships with South Ossetia and Abkhazia make an already difficult situation for Georgia worse by introducing yet another roadblock before the leadership in Tbilisi. The effect of this roadblock is diminished prospects for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. Russia is the primary beneficiary of this state of affairs. Moscow's earlier attempts to manipulate Georgia via economic leverage failed because Georgia was able to circumvent the pressure. Russia has found through the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia a functional strategy that will be difficult for Georgia to surmount. The current situation enables Russia to manipulate Tbilisi and may outright prevent Georgia from improving its NATO membership prospects. Russia has positioned itself in a way that allows it to raise the cost not only for Georgia, should it decide to try to forcibly reclaim control of the breakaway regions, but also for NATO should it choose to grant Georgia membership in the Alliance. Doing so might force the Alliance to confront Russia, which has firmly planted its flag in Georgia (that is, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and part of Georgia proper) and is in effect daring anyone to make it move that flag.

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IV. RUSSIAN INTERESTS

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze why Georgia is important to Russia, why Russia is against Georgia joining NATO, and how Moscow has attempted to influence Georgia and prevent it from joining NATO.

A. RUSSIA'S INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The South Caucasus, which includes Georgia, is important to the Russian leadership. Russians have described it as being vital to their national interests on multiple occasions over many years in conjunction with expressions of concern about Western encroachment in the region. Russian interests in the region have not changed much over time. What has changed are the methods that Russia has used to leverage its influence, especially in Georgia. The analysis in this thesis begins with 2000 because in that year Vladimir Putin was elected President and began to reassert Russian strength.

In 2000, Scott Jones wrote that there was a new great game in the Caucasus with Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Certain Western countries as players.¹⁷⁴ This great game includes governments and multinational corporations competing for pipelines, markets, and political influence. One of the chief attractions in the area is its large oil and gas reserves.¹⁷⁵ Russia's interests in the region in 2000 were primarily related to maintaining access to these resources. In addition to the challenge posed by other governments and multinational corporations, Russia's National Security Concept in 2000 also listed NATO's eastward expansion, the "possible appearance of foreign military bases and large troop contingents in direct proximity to Russia's borders," as well as the "outbreak

¹⁷⁴ Scott Jones, *Introduction to Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*. New York: Routledge, 2000, 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and escalation of conflicts near the state border of the Russian Federation and the external borders of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States” as possible threats to Russia’s national security.¹⁷⁶

In 2002, Vitaly V. Naumkin of the International Center for Strategic and Political Studies in Moscow showed that not much had changed when he succinctly wrote that the South Caucasus was of interest to Russia for, security and economic reasons. He listed five factors that are tied to Russia’s security or economic interests, which mirrored the National Security Concept in 2000:

- It borders on the North Caucasus, which generates grave internal threats to Russia’s security.
- It separates Russia from its major southern partners, Turkey and Iran. It has a high level of instability, with some serious unsettled internal conflicts.
- There is potential for conflict in relations between South Caucasian states and with their southern neighbors.
- The states of the region play an important role in the development of the mineral resources of the Caspian Basin.
- Global and regional powers, and other states as well, are paying increasing attention to the region.¹⁷⁷

In early 2007, R. Craig Nation wrote that, “Russia has important investments and economic interests at stake in the region. Its commitment to the exploitation of Caspian basin oil and natural gas potential is considerable. The perception of U.S. and EU encroachment designed to detach the region from Russia and attach it to a putative Euro-Atlantic community is viewed as an assault on vital national interests.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ 2000 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 10 January 2000, <http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/36aba64ac09f737fc32575d9002bbf31?OpenDocument> (accessed 9 March 2010).

¹⁷⁷ Vitaly Naumkin, “Russian Policy in the South Caucasus” *The Quarterly Journal*, No. 3 (September 2002), 31. http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_jul02/co_jul02e.pdf (accessed 3 March 2010).

¹⁷⁸ Craig R. Nation, “Russia, The United States, and The Caucasus,” *The Strategic Studies Institute*, (February 2007), 31, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub764.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2010).

In August 2008, after the war in Georgia, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev presented the five principles of Russia's foreign policy. Numbers four and five are most relevant to Russia's interests in Georgia. In describing principle number 4 President Medvedev stated that, "protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country. Our foreign policy decisions will be based on this need. We will also protect the interests of our business community abroad. It should be clear to all that we will respond to any aggressive acts committed against us."¹⁷⁹ In speaking of principle number five, he stated, "as is the case of other countries, there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests. These regions are home to countries with which we share special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbours. We will pay particular attention to our work in these regions and build friendly ties with these countries, our close neighbors."¹⁸⁰

It is not unusual for a country to declare its intentions to protect its citizens and businesses interests abroad. The principle that was the most interesting and that garnered the most attention was principle number five, which is surprising since it is nothing more than a restatement of a position that Russia has held for some time.

The information cited above suggests that Russia's core interests have not changed much since 2000. Of Russia's numerous interests in the Caucasus four stand out: control of energy resources, prevention of Western encroachment, protection of Russian citizens, and maintenance of the area as a buffer zone. All four of these issues are related in one way or another to the security of the state or to economic interests, which have been fairly consistent since 2000. These issues place Georgian interests at odds with Russian interests.

An examination of Russia's political and economic actions in the South Caucasus suggests that Moscow was attempting to implement a foreign policy that would increase its influence in the South Caucasus in ways that would address what it perceived to be threats to its security and economic interests. It is also clear that the Soviet legacy in the

¹⁷⁹ Interview Given by Dmitri Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Rossia, and NTV, 31 August 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912type82916_206003.shtml

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

region, territorial gerrymandering, and economic dependence derived from 70 years in the Soviet economy provided Moscow with means by which it could increase its influence and protect its interests in what had once been constituent elements of the USSR. Moscow pursued these interests with varying degrees of success.

B. RUSSIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GEORGIA

1. Introduction

Russia's relationship with Georgia has been more problematic than its relationships with the other two states in the South Caucasus. Between 1999 and 2008 Russia attempted to increase its influence in Georgia both politically and economically. Georgia's goals were not compatible with Russia's goals in the South Caucasus, especially from the Russian perspective. Among the many Russian grievances with Georgia were its efforts to "forge closer ties with the USA and the EU, as well as the country's drive to join NATO, its reluctance to support Russia in its struggle with the Chechen insurrection and the Georgian government's insistence on closure of the Russian military bases on Georgian soil."¹⁸¹ Moscow's efforts to draw Georgia back into its orbit were unsuccessful and even counterproductive.

2. Russian Military Bases

The Tbilisi government has long desired the closure of the Russian military bases on Georgian soil. The Russian government has retained the bases because it regards them as important for power projection and maintaining influence in the region. The contradictory desires of Tbilisi and Moscow regarding Russian bases in Georgia have remained one of many sources of friction between the two countries.

¹⁸¹ Fatma Ashi Kelkitli, "Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus under Putin." *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs* (Winter 2008), 71.
http://www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/volume13/winter/fatma_asli_kelkitli.pdf (accessed 3 March 2010).

3. Chechen Support

At the beginning of the second Russo-Chechen war, in 1999, Georgia allowed Chechen refugees to settle in the Pankisi Gorge with Georgian citizens of Chechen origin. This prompted Russian President Boris Yeltsin to request Georgian assistance in attacks against Chechen rebels, a request which Tbilisi rejected.¹⁸² The Georgian government allowed a Chechen Representation Office and Information Center to operate in Tbilisi in addition to the publication of a Chechen newspaper assisted by the Association of the Georgian Free Press.¹⁸³ The Chechen newspaper and the Chechen Representation Office and Information Center were of benefit to the cause of Chechen independence and made Georgia appear supportive of this cause; and this was not pleasing to the leadership in Russia. The Russian leadership considered the Pankisi Gorge to be a safe haven from which Chechen militants launched attacks into Chechnya against Russian forces in addition to terrorizing the local population.¹⁸⁴

Russia and Georgia attempted to solve the issue by signing a security agreement in June 2000, but failed to achieve a major breakthrough in bilateral relations. Russia instituted a visa control regime against Georgia that was announced in November 2000 and scheduled to take effect in December 2000.¹⁸⁵ The visa control regime was followed by Russian threats in the summer of 2002 to send troops into the Pankisi Gorge unless Georgia took measures against Chechen fighters believed by Russia to be operating from the area. Georgia did so by deploying 1,000 soldiers to the area.¹⁸⁶ The 1,000 troops sent to the Pankisi Gorge by Tbilisi did little to assure Moscow, however, In September 2002, Putin declared that, in accordance with the right to self-defense recognized in the UN

182 Zeyno Baran, "The Caucasus: Ten Years after Independence," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2002), 224.

183 Fatma Ashi Kelkitli, "Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus under Putin," *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs* (Winter 2008), 71–72.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid., 73.

Charter, Moscow had the right to conduct attacks in Georgia to protect Russia from Chechen insurgents.¹⁸⁷ The two sides called for a truce in October 2002 and Georgia extradited several Chechen rebels to Russia.¹⁸⁸

4. American Military Presence

The presence of American soldiers on Georgian soil led to unease on the part of the Russian leadership. In April 2002, the United States Department of Defense announced that it would begin the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). The program was intended to enhance the counter-terrorism capabilities of Georgia and to address the situation in the Pankisi Gorge.¹⁸⁹ It was designed to provide staff training and tactical training, along with a transfer of military equipment.¹⁹⁰ The governments of the United States and Georgia tried to lower Russian anxiety by emphasizing “that any such equipment will be provided for the four battalions and one company only for the duration of their training and is not intended to be a rearmament program for the entire Georgian army.”¹⁹¹ Russia was informed by Georgia that “the U.S. advisors were training Georgian soldiers outside Tbilisi and had played no role in the Pankisi Gorge Operations,” but this was considered to be of little assurance for the Russian government.¹⁹² Georgia also granted U.S. military personnel visa free entry into the country, legal exemptions from prosecution, and permission to carry weapons off duty, as

¹⁸⁷ Jaba Devdariani, “Putin Ultimatum Raises Stakes in Georgia,” *Eurasianet*, September 12, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091202.shtml> (accessed 3 March 2010).

¹⁸⁸ Tracey German, *Faultline or Foothold? Georgia's Relations with Russia & The USA*. Camberly, United Kingdom: Conflict Studies Research Center; Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, January, 2004, 4. <http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/caucasus/P41/view> (accessed 3 March 2010).

¹⁸⁹ United States Department of Defense Press Release “Georgia Train and Equip Program Begins,” 29 April 2002, <http://www.defense.gov/Releases/Release.aspx?ReleaseID=3326> (accessed 4 March 2010).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Tracey German, *Faultline or Foothold? Georgia's Relations with Russia & The USA*. Camberly, United Kingdom: Conflict Studies Research Center; Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, January, 2004, 8.

¹⁹² Fatma Ash Kelkitli, “Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus under Putin,” *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs* (Winter 2008), 73.

well as overfly rights.¹⁹³ This military cooperation agreement between the United States and Georgia put U.S. military personnel on par with diplomats and granted far more freedom than was accorded to Russian troops stationed in Georgia at the time. This circumstance also increased tension with Russia.¹⁹⁴

C. ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE VIA ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MECHANISMS

Despite the tension between the two countries, Russia continued its efforts to increase its influence in Georgia through purchases in the Georgian energy and finance sector. In July 2003, the Georgian government and Gazprom signed a memorandum on strategic cooperation for twenty-five years that would provide Russian natural gas to Georgian customers as well as upgrade the pipeline in Georgia.¹⁹⁵ In August 2003, RAO Unified Energy Systems (UES), a Russian electricity company purchased a 75 percent stake in Georgia's AES (Applied Energy Services)-Telasi joint venture from AES Silk Road in a deal that gave UES a tremendous share of Georgia's domestic electricity market.¹⁹⁶ In 2005, Russia's Vneshtorgbank bought 51 percent of the shares of one of the top banks in Georgia, United Georgia Bank.¹⁹⁷

The relations between the two countries became hostile in September 2006 after four Russian military officers were arrested in Tbilisi for espionage and accused of obtaining information related to Georgia's defensive capabilities, strategies for NATO

¹⁹³ Tracey German, *Faultline or Foothold? Georgia's Relations with Russia & The US*,. Camberly, United Kingdom: Conflict Studies Research Center; Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, January, 2004, 8.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Fatma Ashi Kelkitli. "Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus under Putin," *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs* (Winter 2008), 77.

¹⁹⁶ Baran Zeyno, "Deals Give Russian Company Influence Over Georgia's Energy Infrastructure," Eurasianet, 18 August 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav081803.shtml> (accessed 4 March 2010).

¹⁹⁷ "Vneshtorgbank buys controlling block of UBG Shares," <http://www.armeniandiaspora.com/showthread.php?16624-Vneshtorgbank-buys-controlling-bloc-of-UBG-shares>(accessed 4 March 2010).

integration, energy, security, and political parties.¹⁹⁸ The Russian government responded two days later by recalling its ambassador to Georgia and announcing a partial evacuation of Russian personnel and their families, citing a growing threat to their security.¹⁹⁹ On 2 October 2006 the Georgian government freed the Russian officers that had been detained.²⁰⁰ Within hours of the release Russia “suspended all railway, highway, maritime, and air transport, as well as postal services, between Russia and Georgia.”²⁰¹ Dmitri Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, described the goals of the economic sanctions as nothing short of reversing Georgia’s policies with the statement that “It’s a matter of changing their attitude totally.”²⁰²

The spy scandal occurred against the backdrop of Georgia receiving an offer of an Intensified Dialogue with NATO.

According to an update published on the NATO website, “Georgia will have access to a more intense political exchange with NATO Allies on its membership aspirations and relevant reforms, without prejudice to any eventual Alliance decision on a further membership process. Such consultations take place at different levels, from staff talks between the NATO secretariat and Georgian authorities to high-level political consultations between Georgia and the North Atlantic Council.”²⁰³ The intensified dialogue was a significant achievement for Tbilisi because it could be regarded as a reward for “Georgia’s performance on security sector reforms as well as its participation

198 Michael Mainville, “Georgia Arrests Russian Officers for Spying and Surrounds Army HQ,” *Guardian*, 26 September 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/28/russia.georgia> (accessed 4 March 2010).

199 Diana Petriashvili, “Russia Recalls Ambassador To Georgia, Plans Evacuation,” *Eurasianet*, 28 September 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav092806.shtml> (accessed 4 March 2010).

200 Diana Petriashvili, “Georgia Frees Accused Spies, But Feud With Moscow Continues,” *Eurasianet*, 2 October 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav100206.shtml> (accessed 4 March 2010).

201 Vladimir Socor, “Russia’s Economic And Political Warfare Failing To Subdue Georgia,” *Jamestown*, 9 October 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews percent5Btt_news percent5D=32116 (accessed 4 March 2010).

202 Ibid.

203 NATO Offers Intensified Dialogue to Georgia, September 2006, <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/09-september/e0921c.htm> (accessed 4 March 2010).

in NATO-led and U.S.-led operations.”²⁰⁴ NATO’s offer of an Intensified Dialogue to Georgia was considered by some to be the highpoint of its efforts to move closer toward the alliance.²⁰⁵

Near the end of 2006, Russia began to feel that it was losing its grip on Georgia. Georgia had “achieved a solid national consensus for the Western orientation, competent and effective governance, an efficient counter-intelligence service, and double-digit economic growth this year, despite Russia’s embargo on Georgia’s traditional agricultural and wine exports.”²⁰⁶ In addition, Georgia’s importance as an energy transit country increased the West’s stake in Georgia’s security and successful development. Vladimir Socor wrote in 2006 that at the time Moscow had almost exhausted or lost all forms of leverage on Georgia.²⁰⁷ He also made the almost prophetic statement that “Short of launching military operations or staging attacks by proxies, Moscow can only continue inflicting economic pain on Georgia for some limited period of time, a danger point of which will be reached this coming winter. But the main effect of Russia’s economic sanctions and psychological warfare can already be seen in the acceleration of Georgia’s economic reorientation toward international markets and its overall political and strategic reliance on Western partners and allies. Russia is no longer able to halt Georgia’s independent development.”²⁰⁸

D. THE FIVE DAY WAR

In August 2008, Vladimir Socor’s 2006 observation about possible Russian “military operations” became a reality. Russia asserted itself militarily and fought a five

²⁰⁴ Vladimir Socor, “Russia’s Economic and Political Warfare Failing To Subdue Georgia,” *Jamestown*, 9 October 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews percent5Btt_news percent5D=32116 (accessed 4 March 2010).

²⁰⁵ Kakha Jibladze, “Russia’s Opposition to Georgia’s Quest for NATO Membership,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly* 5, No 1. (2007): 45–51, 47.

²⁰⁶ Vladimir Socor, “Russia’s Economic And Political Warfare Failing To Subdue Georgia,” *Jamestown*, 9 October 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews percent5Btt_news percent5D=32116 (accessed 4 March 2010).

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

day long war with Georgia. The fact Russia and Georgia fought a war is one of the few points of agreement concerning the events of August 2008.

There is major disagreement over who started the conflict. Russia claims that its military actions were taken in response to Georgia's attack on Tshkinvali and the Russian peacekeepers that were located there.²⁰⁹ Tshkinvali is the capital of South Ossetia, a disputed region that is widely recognized as legally being a part of Georgia. Tbilisi's version of events contradicts the accounts advanced by Russia. Georgia holds that it was "faced with a military buildup among South Ossetian forces and unacceptable provocation against Georgian villages, it began its assault soon after—but only after—Russia had begun to move heavy armour through the Roki tunnel onto Georgian territory."²¹⁰

A long-awaited report by an ostensibly neutral party, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, did little to definitively solve the question of who was responsible for starting the war. According to a BBC report published after the release of the report, Russia asserted that the report "delivered an 'unequivocal answer' on the question of who started the conflict, while Georgia "said the investigation proved that Russia had been preparing for war all along."²¹¹ Georgia is not alone in its belief that Russia had long been preparing for war. Andrei Illarionov, a former economic advisor to President Putin, held that the war between Russia and Georgia is an event that was unavoidable. He argued that, "The Russian leadership had in fact taken very important decisions that made war between Russia and Georgia inevitable much earlier—between September 1999 and June 2003." The war, in his view, was part of the execution of a "Grand Plan" that had existed for years.²¹² Strobe Talbott expressed a similar view although he did not go as far as to claim that Russia had a grand plan. In

²⁰⁹ Roy Allison, 2008. "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign To Coerce Georgia To Peace," *International Affairs*, 84(6): 1145–1171, 1148.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ "Georgia 'Started Unjustified War,'" *BBC*, 30 September 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8281990.stm> (accessed 10 March 2010).

²¹² Andrei Illarionov, "Russia as Aggressor: The View of Andrei Illarionov," December 2009, *European Stability Initiative*, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=281&story_ID=26 (accessed 3 March 2010), 45.

the preface to Ronald Asmus' book A Little War that Shook the World, Talbott wrote, "for months-indeed, years before Russian tanks rolled through the Roki Tunnel, powerful players in Moscow were looking for a pretext for an invasion, occupation, and virtual if not literal annexation of Georgian territory."²¹³ Roy Allison did not discover a grand plan, as did Illarionov, but he presented an argument that is supportive of Talbott's. In his view, there is evidence to suggest that Moscow's actions in Georgia were planned and not "defensive and retaliatory" as has been claimed by Moscow.²¹⁴

The speed and logistical efficiency with which large Russian contingents were sent by land and sea into Abkhazia in August 2008 and then entered western Georgia similarly fits the picture of a major operation carefully planned by the Russian general staff.²¹⁵

It is likely that the debate over who started the war will continue and not conclude anytime soon. At this point, the question of who started the war, while important, appears to be more of a side issue compared to Russia's purposes in the war.

It is clear that through this war Russia has drawn a clear line in the sand in regard to Georgia. One of the primary motivations for Russia's actions appears to be the threat it felt from Georgia potentially becoming a member of NATO. Stopping NATO expansion in the sphere claimed by Moscow is considered key to Russian national security. Such sentiments have been expressed by Russian leaders and intellectuals. Sergey Karaganov, a prominent expert on international affairs, was regarded as one of Russia's leading foreign policy experts, believes that

NATO expansion towards Russian borders and the inclusion in NATO of countries whose elites had historical complexes with regard to Russia because of their setbacks and defeats in previous centuries, have increased anti-Russian sentiments in the alliance. I do hope that Tbilisi's attack on South Ossetia and Russia's response to it will prove to be a fruitful episode in the historical perspective. The sacrifice—the Ossetians, Russians and Georgians who died in that war—may not be in vain. Russian troops gave

²¹³ Ronald Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, vii.

²¹⁴ Roy Allison, 2008. "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign To Coerce Georgia To Peace," *International Affairs*, 84(6): 1145–1171, 1148.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1151.

a strong military rebuff to the logic of NATO's infinite expansion which, if not stopped, would inevitably bring about a big war—not in Georgia but around Ukraine, almost in the heart of Europe.²¹⁶

Also, a 2007 report by a group analyzing what they thought Russia's position in world politics would be in 2017 also raised the issue of NATO enlargement in the post-Soviet space.

With respect to Russia, it is important to mention the possibility of armed conflicts breaking out near its borders and the danger of getting involved in them; the emergence of an unfriendly military-political environment; the problem of unrecognized states in the post-Soviet area; and NATO's further eastward expansion (to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova).²¹⁷

Russia's reliance on political and economic mechanisms allowed it to increase its influence or, at the minimum, create acceptable conditions in every state in the Southern Caucasus with the exception of Georgia. Georgia was intractable in its refusal to submit to Russian pressure. In Russian eyes this refusal was compounded by its desire to join NATO, which placed its actions in opposition to Russian national security concerns. In the process conditions were created in which Russia was losing control in Georgia and facing a threat to its security (whether real or imagined is debatable). Russia also attacked Georgia at least in part because it was clear that its reliance on economic and political levers had proven ineffective.

While NATO encroachment was a major security concern, there were three other interests that Russia would be able to address by attacking Georgia: controlling energy resources, protecting Russian citizens, and maintaining the area as a buffer zone. Aside from national security concerns it would also be difficult to rule out an opportunity for Russia to humiliate what Moscow considered to be a proxy that had been trained by the U.S. military.

²¹⁶ Sergey Karagonov, "Russia, Georgia, the World in 2009," December 2009, *European Stability Initiative*, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=281&story_ID=26 (accessed 3 March 2010) 27.

²¹⁷ Timofei Bordachev, "The EU, Russia, and the Caucasus," December 2009, *European Stability Initiative*, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=281&story_ID=26 (accessed 3 March 2010) 28.

In the process, Russia was sending a message to a number of parties. The message was that Moscow's interests matter. The message to the United States and NATO was to stay out of Russia's privileged sphere. The message to Georgia was that it should reconsider its hostile attitude as well as its desire to join NATO.

As far as the war's effect on Georgia's NATO aspirations, there were clearly some setbacks. However, it is unlikely that the war will have any long term effects on Georgia's desire to join the Alliance. As far as Tbilis is concerned, Georgia continues on its path to membership. Evidence to this effect can be found in Georgia's recent comprehensive review of its military. Although Georgia has not received a MAP from NATO, Tbilisi continues to strive towards eventual membership by acting as though it does have a MAP and by working independently toward meeting the standards for NATO membership.²¹⁸ However, Russia retains the ability to destabilize Georgia because of the influence that it maintains in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which is a factor that complicates Georgia's bid for membership in the Alliance. According to the 1995 NATO Study on Enlargement, solving ethnic and territorial disputes by peaceful means is an important consideration for NATO membership.

States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Stratfor, "Georgia: A New Military Strategy," 4 March 2010, http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20100303_georgia_new_military_strategy (accessed 21 March 2010).

²¹⁹ Study on NATO Enlargement, Chapter 1: Purposes and Principals of Enlargement, paragraph 6, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9502.htm> (accessed 11 August 2010).

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V. CONCLUSION

Georgia's November 2003 Rose Revolution accelerated the country's quest for membership in the main Western security institution, NATO. Georgia's prospects for membership in the Atlantic Alliance are limited by internal and external factors. The internal factors include its uneven progress towards democratization and the challenges associated with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The primary external factors are Russia's policy toward Georgia and its influence via Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This conclusion reviews the impact of these factors on Georgia's prospects and closes with an assessment of the implications of Georgia's non-accession to the Atlantic Alliance in the foreseeable future.

Georgia has demonstrated remarkable, yet uneven, progress in regard to its political, military, and economic reforms. Economically Georgia's reforms have resulted in changes that led to it receiving high marks from institutions such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Georgia still ranks among the top 15 countries in the world in terms of ease of doing business despite the worldwide economic downturn.²²⁰ An additional sign of success in the Georgian economy is its growth in GDP from -10.1 percent in 2009 to 8.4 percent during the second quarter of 2010.²²¹ Georgia's economic performance has thus been commendable.

Tbilisi's progress on military reforms has been commendable as well. Georgia has established democratic and civilian control of its armed forces. Tbilisi has also demonstrated that it is capable of contributing militarily to NATO's new missions. This has been evident in its participation in operations in Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

²²⁰ Ranking from the Doing Business 2010 report, <http://www.doingbusiness.org/economyrankings/> (accessed 17 June 2010).

²²¹ Gross Domestic Product of Georgia in 2010 report, http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/nad/GDP_2010Q2_press-release__Eng.pdf (accessed 23 October 2010).

The reforms that require the greatest effort by Georgia in order to increase its prospects for NATO membership concern democratization. The need for such reforms is raised frequently. It was raised at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 and again at the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit in 2009. Chief among the issues related to democratization are the one-party system, the lack of media freedom, and the manipulation of election laws.²²² All have been used to enable the United National Movement (UNM) to maintain control of the country. They have also led to criticism of the level of democratic development in Georgia.

Georgia has made remarkable progress in democratization. However, continued progress is necessary in order to remain credible as a potential member of the alliance. Georgia's political leaders could address the shortcomings associated with the country's democratization if they chose to do so. For example, President Saakashvili and his UNM party could take steps to improve the fairness of elections by refraining from any actions that are manipulative, or that appear to be manipulative. The central government could also relax its control over the media and allow for more diversity in terms of programming and viewpoints other than the official party line that dominates the media.

These two actions alone would improve Tbilisi's record on democratization and also respond to some of the major criticisms that have been directed to it in that regard. These steps would also contribute to solving another major problem associated with Tbilisi's effort to democratize—the negative perceptions related to one-party rule. The UNM remains popular in Georgia as shown by the May 2010 municipal elections. The UNM won at least 55 percent of the vote in every region of the country.²²³

Lincoln Mitchell has summed up the situation well. In his judgment, the electoral manipulation actions by Saakashvili and the UNM are not only undemocratic but also politically unnecessary. Tbilisi is considered by some observers to have been an important stronghold for Georgia's opposition politicians, yet they were routed by the

²²² Alexander Cooley, and Lincoln Mitchell, "Georgia: The Interconnections between Democracy and Security," *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 17 (21 May 2010), 3.

²²³ Civil GE election Map, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=32&result=proportional> (accessed 24 October 2010).

UNM.²²⁴ Saakashvili and the UNM have the ability to address the issues related to democratization. Yet they have not taken significant steps to do so.

Some observers believe that the situation may be getting worse. In October 2010 Georgia's parliament, which is dominated by the UNM, passed a controversial constitutional amendment by a vote of 112 to 5.²²⁵ Supporters of the amendment say that it will introduce more checks and balances into the political system by curbing presidential powers and strengthening the role of the prime minister.²²⁶ Detractors of the amendment say that it will allow Saakashvili to hold onto power by seeking the job of prime minister after his presidential term ends in 2013.²²⁷ Currently the constitution forbids Saakashvili from running for President again. Critics like "Vakhtand Dzabiradze, a member of a public constitutional commission grouping Georgian legal experts and NGOs, are concerned this latest move may represent a serious step back for Georgian politics."²²⁸ This latest move by Saakashvili and his party provides more ammunition for critics of Georgian democratization. The democratization process is, however, one of the factors that Tbilisi could unilaterally cultivate to improve its prospects for NATO membership.

The separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia along with Russia's influence represent internal and external factors that are linked. They constitute the most difficult of Georgia's challenges to solve, and Tbilisi's ability to meet these challenges alone is limited.

These two issues are linked because both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia. Yet Moscow has recognized their independence and is deepening its relationship with both republics.

²²⁴ Ellen Barry, "Georgia President Aided by Mayoral Election," *New York Times*, May 30, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/world/europe/31georgia.html> (accessed 24 October 2010).

²²⁵ Georgian Parliament Approves Controversial Constitutional Amendment, http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgian_Parliament_Approves_Controversial_Constitutional_Amendment/2191769.html (accessed 24 October 2010).

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

Neither of the republics appears to desire reconciliation with Tbilisi. They are both heavily reliant on Russia for financial support and security. The status quo benefits Russia because its presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia serves as a check on NATO enlargement as well as a check on Georgia. Russia's presence serves as a check on NATO enlargement because the alliance is unlikely to admit Georgia as long as the status of the two regions remains unresolved. Russia's military presence serves as a check on Georgia because the Russian forces provide Moscow with an option to destabilize the situation at a time of its choosing. The major difference between Russian military positioning in 2010 and 2008 is that Moscow could now invade Georgia much more rapidly and extensively. Russia removed its troops from the village of Perevi in October 2010, and the move was described as "a step in the right direction" by the Georgian Foreign Ministry, which also referred to it as "only a microscopic step in the obligations Russia must fulfill in line with the August 12, 2008, ceasefire agreement."²²⁹

It is unlikely that Russia will remove its troops from Georgia anytime soon, especially not as long as Georgia continues its quest for NATO membership. Russia's concerns in the region have been relatively consistent. Russia has repeatedly mentioned Western encroachment and NATO expansion as threats to its influence in the South Caucasus. The only way that Georgia might be able to overcome the challenges associated with its separatist regions and Russia's influence over them is with tangible support from the member states of NATO and the European Union. These states have expressed support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and have provided some aid and assistance, but they have little reason to expect Moscow to change its behavior.

Georgia's prospects for NATO membership do not appear to be favorable in the foreseeable future, barring a major unexpected breakthrough. In order to improve its prospects Georgia must make progress on reforms related to democratization as well as overcome the issues associated with its separatist regions, which are complicated by Russia's involvement. Georgia has the power to make progress on democratization,

²²⁹ Russian Troop Pullout 'step in right direction' – Georgian Foreign Ministry, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101018/161003657.html> (accessed 24 October 2010).

although recently Tbilisi has not demonstrated the will to do so. As far as the issues involving the separatist regions are concerned, Tbilisi appears to have the will to act, but lacks the power to do so.

Whether Georgia becomes a NATO member or not has implications not only for Georgia but for NATO and European security as well. Should Georgia fail to become a member of NATO, the democratic gains that have been made since the Rose Revolution could be reversed in favor of an authoritarian government. The framework for such a development, should it occur, is already in place in the form of Saakashvili and his UNM party, which dominates the entire government. If Georgia does not become a credible democracy, the responsibility will reside mainly with the Georgian people. NATO, the European Union, and other outside organizations can offer advice and assistance, but the ultimate responsibility rests with the Georgian people and local political elites.

The greatest beneficiary of Georgia's failure to obtain membership in NATO would be Russia. Significantly increased Russian influence in the region could present a threat to the energy security of Europe. The South Caucasus nations of Azerbaijan and Georgia are important transit countries for the Nabucco, Trans-Adriatic, and Trans-Caspian pipelines, which are all at different levels of development.²³⁰ They are key elements in arrangements designed to diminish Russia's dominance of east-west pipelines providing energy to Europe.²³¹ If Georgia fails to obtain NATO membership and subsequently falls back into Russia's sphere of influence, Moscow will have enhanced means to affect Europe's energy security. Such a scenario could present major challenges to the European Union as well as to NATO. It could provide Russia with leverage that could be used to weaken both organizations to its benefit by dividing their member states.

²³⁰ The Abominable Gas Man, http://www.economist.com/node/17260657?story_id=17260657 (accessed 24 October 2010).

²³¹ Ibid.

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